WORDEATER 51

WORDEATER 51 staff

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Judy Lake
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To get a submission printed in this issue, four of the seven people on the staff had to vote for acceptance. For the award winners, only John Stobart is responsible.

AWARDS

>poetry

$25 to Dan Druszkowski

>prose

$25 to Judy Lake

>front cover

$10 to Dan Druszkowski

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NEXT DEADLINE:

April 19, 1985

Manuscripts or cover designs for WORDEATER 53 must be submitted to John Stobart in room C-1069 by:

April 19, 1985

Manuscripts will not be returned and SHOULD BE TYPED.

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Dan Druszkowski

A QUESTION

Heaven sends forth her glory
To convict the doers of wrong
Standing upon wisdom
Yet fading before too long
The promises presented
In pictures and in song
Are they all for real?
Or fiction passed along?

****

Judy Belfield

SOMETHING VIOLENT

Something violent
like Nature in bad temper
out to sea
a seething eddy
coming up from the ocean floor
with a slow rumble
into a mad crashing clash
at the surface . . .

I cannot say it is my soul
erupting from wherever it hides
to scream for God--
God is too easy an answer.

****

Judy Belfield

BACKTRACKING

Young thing
lean and lithe
moving with the grace
of a giraffe's neck
your blonde-streaked hair
spilling over an eye
that speaks all the tomorrows
of your life.
I would not be twenty again
even for you,
though your smooth chest
invites regress.

Young thing
long and lush
like willow-limbs swaying
on a late spring night;
and I whisper to you this way.
I would not be twenty again
even for you.

****

Shelbia Chandler

DID YOU EVER SIT AND WONDER

Did you ever sit and wonder
Why the Lord made man?
I've thought a lot about it,
But I still don't understand.

Maybe He was lonely
And wanted a friend or two,
Or perhaps he was bored
And found nothing better to do.

Could it be that we were experiments
That somehow went quite wrong
who mutated and multiplied
And were amazingly strong.

Perhaps, there's no such Being
A god by any name
Maybe He was invented
As someone to take the blame.

But I would guess He had a plan
That our simple minds can't see.
Some complex explanation
As to why we had to be.

Now, mind you, I'm not complaining
I've no objections, you understand;
It's just that I sometimes wonder
Why did God make man?

****

Panda

CURIOSITY KILLED THE MOTH?

Sometimes I feel
Like the proverbial moth
Who gets much too close to the flame
To attempt to pledge her troth.

Curiosity is the feeling
That draws her near,
But ignorance is her downfall
As her wings begin to sear.

Getting closer and closer,
She breathes her last breath.
She surrenders herself
To the flame and her death.

Will I someday get
Too close to the flame
And breathe my last breath
With my ignorance to blame?

****

W. A. Kahle

KNOW-IT-ALLS

Babbling babblers
go on and on
preaching thread-bare ideas,
gobbled and consumed
by unworthy brains.

Injustice prevails
in the Kingdom of Bullheads--
breaking concepts
into bite-size pieces,
to later trash.

Ignorant geniuses
plant seedlings
fed by doubt and despair.
"It is so! Don't be
a fool!," says the fool
"For I know it all,
even if I don't understand it!"

Oops . . .

****

Shelbia Chandler

PLEASE, SIR, WON'T YOU EXCUSE ME?

Please, Sir, won't you excuse me?
I don't want to take this test
You see, I didn't study
So I just can't do my best.

Or should I say I've been sick
And missed the last three days?
Or that you taught it much too fast
And the facts flew by in a haze?

Could I say I've lost my notes
And had no one's to borrow?
Would you buy this is your mistake
The test is really tomorrow?

If I get a failing grade
Would you let me try again
Oh, all right! I give up
Since I see I just can't win.

****

Judy Belfield

ELITIST

They grab the word
and use it
like oxygen:
inhale quickly
then breathe it out again.
I never want to "love"
if love is so ordinary,
if it can be as humdrum
as the people
who think they're in its throes.
I'd rather hate
with bile or venom
than settle for drab.

****

Dan Druszkowski

ADVOCATES

A myriad of voices
Lacking wisdom
Singing songs
That haunt the skies
Provoking tempers of which
Shake the hand of Satan

A tear that had some choices
Stacking kingdoms
Ringing wrongs
That taunt its cries
Revoking heaven while it
Rakes the sand of Satan

A fear of man and noise
Attacking freedom
Seeing all
Who daunt the wise
Invoking hell with smiles that
Quake the land of Satan

****

Donna Shibovich

MY AGE

In my existence
I am ageless
I haven't the will to let figures
and stereotypes
define me
But if I must . . .
I wish to be known
as young and fresh
to the older mind, yet
old and wise
to the younger kind
I wish not to be known
as any kind to the mind
who calls me young
and old
in a single moment.

Panda

CYNICISM

I still remember when I gazed upon the sadness in your eyes.
The memory is extremely vivid in dreams that seem to repeat the moments.
It was a time when uncertainty was rampant;
And trust had become a four-letter word.
Love almost didn't exist except in some fantasy world that we
Believed only others knew the directions to.
Attempting to fit pieces that weren't part of the same puzzle
Had become an excruciatingly frustrating daily event.
But in the dim light of hope, one could see a bond forming;
Forming between two souls searching for relevance and purpose.
Both had begged for a moment to share,
Not realizing that a moment might shift toward an infinity,
Creating an extremely close parallel.

Judy Belfield

****

W. A. Kahle

NEW TUNE

Heard it today--
blew my brain--
catapulted fantasies
shot
into tonight.
I'm high
on rhythm--
gone away
a million
kilowatts . . .
cranked the
volume
until the
knob
b
r
o
k
e
o
f
f
.
.
.

****

Donna Shibovich

TO SAY HELLO

To say hello
in a crowded room
and have your voice
returned to you
unchanged--
Alone.

****

HIDEAWAYS

Beware the danger
in dark alleys of memory;
to walk there alone
is foolhardy.
Instead, stay in today,
gathering bodies round about--
these are sure,
if not attuned
to your savage leanings.
Were you to tell them
they would recoil
one by one,
their stomachs knotted in horror.
Best to sit and smile--
a mask is the only way
to survive.

****

Mike Troyer

THE FORGOTTEN SCORE

Looking down upon the earth,
One would smile and laugh with mirth
To ever imagine that such a place
Had ever contained the human race.

The grimness of the black, burnt ground;
The awesome silence all around.
One might thing it's quite clear--
Mighty mankind has never been here.

But yet, at distance away from you,
The remnants of an old church pew.
Next to it a holy cross,
Showing growth of dark green moss.

While years ago Man had his say,
Almost every trace is erased today.
The Devil smiled with a nod--
Man had confused himself with God.

What more is there that I can say?
Man has gone his separate way.
Long ago he forgot the score,
So he paid the price for atomic war.

****

Kim Baxa

DANCE SHE SAID

"Dance" she said
"Dance for me"
"Dance" she said
"Let your body be"
"Dance" she said
"Let your spirit fly"
"Dance" she said
"Until you reach that high"

"Let the music course through your body
Let the rhythm reach into your inner
self
Feel the beat in your heart
Feel the electricity in your feet?

"Dance" she said
"Let your feet sing"
"Dance" she said
"Let your heart ring"
"Dance" she said
"Whatever you do"
"Dance" she said
"Dance for you"

****

Judy Belfield

PURSUIT

The wind screeched, a sharp, rushing, high-pitched sound hurling slashes of early-winter rain at the cooling earth. She stood at the large window, drapes pulled tautly at either side, and watched the sky bleed shades of gray into each other. It was morning, but the cars which passed by on the street below all had their headlights on as they knifed through the thick air, beams lighting up long, thin lines in which raged streaks of water hurtled toward the ground.

Yes, she thought . . . yes. It is the perfect beginning for an ending--an ending which has waited much too long; today the scissors snap shut, slice off all the before. After today, there will only be tomorrow. Yes. Yes. She drew the drapes closed.

From across the street, he watched her framed by the yellow square in the gray morning, watched her standing at the window, couldn't tell, exactly, what she might be thinking though, since distance and the darkness obscured her face. And then, the curtains came together, swiftly traveling to a determined destination at the center of the window. Now remained only a thin line of yellow, a narrow gash from top to bottom.

She saw me, he thought. She saw me watching her through the slice at the center, had been watching since very early that morning, had been watching the big, black square before the rain turned furious, saw her shadow bending over the lamp and snapping the room yellow, watched her grip her bathrobe under her chin as she came to the window, watched her stand there for ten minutes without moving until she closed the drapes, and watched, now, the thin line of yellow.

He hadn't been able to see her eyes as she stood there, but he knew they were searching the front of his building, felt them wander from window to window until they stopped on his, saw his fingers holding the fabric ever so slightly. He trembled thinking about it, felt a surge of heat rise up and singe the tips of his ears. She saw me all right, he thought . . . she saw me.

Behind the drapes across the street, she had moved from the living room to her bedroom, where she flicked o[illegible] the

(continued)

Judy Lake

MY BIG CHANCE

"Congratulations!"
You may already be a winner!"

As the message floated
Into the trash,
I wondered if I was passing up
My Big Chance.

I've been waiting all this time
For my ship to come in.

I think it just sank
In a sea of garbage.

****

W. A. Kahle

DATES (FIRST THINGS FIRST)

Exotic dinners turn her on
along with crisp, cool wines.
Classical lyrics taunt a flow
of fire in touching lips.
She desires to dance--
it drops a spark in her spirit--
for romance is her number-one thrill,
still,
who is going to pay this bill?

****

forty-watt-bulb lamp to keep the room as ill-lit as her mood. She began to dress, discarding the bathrobe and a nightgown, exchanging them for daywear. She sat on the bed, drumming her fingers on the nightstand, hesitated momentarily, then opened its single drawer, pulled out a half-full pack of cigarettes, stopped to stare at them, then pulled one out and lit it. As she drew on the cigarette, her head lolled backwards slightly, and she closed her eyes as though this were the beginning of some rhapsody she knew well, and had long awaited. It doesn't matter now, she thought. I can smoke all I want, and it doesn't matter.

He watched her leave the building. She wore a yellow rain slicker and carried an umbrella. The sky had lightened a bit, and the rain had slowed down. He saw her in the doorway, a yellow splotch darting gingerly out to the sidewalk, dodging puddles, a saffron-colored tumbleweed skittering through the rain. When she had put a half-block's distance between them, he pulled up his collar, stuck his hands in his pockets, and followed. This would be easy; the yellow slicker would be hard to lose. He kept the half-block between them, his head bowed against the rain but his eyes never leaving her.

She stopped at a drugstore for a pack of cigarettes. He stood a safe distance away, watching her long, slender fingers dip into her purse and glide across the counter with a dollar bill. The same delicate hand cupped upward to receive the change. She tucked the coins and the cigarettes into a pouch in her purse, her creamy fingers sliding like fluid in, then out of the bag. She shouldered the purse and left the store. Once outside, she popped open her umbrella and continued walking, he following behind.

Legs, a Sargasso Sea of legs, crowding at street corners--trousered, stockinged, bare, booted, shod, fat, thin, curvy, straight--legs waiting for a signal to start moving. At the corners, some are stiff and still, others tap impatiently, some carry all the weight of their corresponding bodies in one or the other limb; all are queued up here on the corner waiting til the light changes, and then, they spring into action. Enmasse, like the legs of some huge centipede, they cross from one wet sidewalk to another, the swish of cars in the rain passing by, distant beep-beeps punctuating the air.

Nylon-stockinged legs fitted ever so elegantly into ankle-high boots, shapely, smooth-looking, reaching up to a yellow slicker--these legs moved too when the light changed. But nobody noticed except the thin, short man who still followed a half-block behind.

He watched her turn in at a building on Taylor Street, saw the yellow slicker get smaller and smaller through the glass door until it disappeared. He could go back home now. She would be at work until 4:30. He would return then, a few minutes before, and follow her home.

She shook the umbrella and hung it on the coat rack inside the glass door. At the end of the hallway, she started to remove the slicker, shook it too, and pushed open the swinging half-door that led into the office area.

"Good morning, Sylvia."

"Good morning, Joanne."

"Morning, Sylvia."

"Morning, Mr. S."

"Hi, Sylvia."

"Good morning, Mildred."

She passed through the offices--reception, payroll, production, shipping--to the art department in the back.

"Good morning, Sylvia."

"Good morning, Mort. John?"

John looked up from his drafting table, lifted his magnifying glasses, smiled, and nodded. She hung up her coat, then looked over John's shoulder.

"Still working on that cover, huh? Thought it was supposed to be ready yesterday."

"It was," John laughed.

"Boy you smell good today," said Mort.

"Something about rain that makes my perfume stronger," she said. She sat down at her desk, took her cigarettes and matches out of her purse, and started lining up the day's jobs--paste ups of liner sheets and price lists for wallpaper sample books--all due last week. Every job she'd ever done here in the past fifteen years was "due last week." Priorities were arranged when jobs became due "two weeks ago," or longer. It's okay, she thought. It'll all be over today. Let that bastard come at me; I'm ready. And he was sure to start bitching; he did so every day just after she arrived, floated in on his short, fat legs, a cigar dangling in the corner of his mouth, tugging at his belt.

(continued)

"Awright, what's the story here? You're workin on the Wallco imprint and the Birch liners, right? What's holdin you up? You had this job a week now, and it's still sittin."

She stood up, stared him in the face, and said, "Stuff Wallco and Birch. I quit."

Not ten minutes after she'd arrived, she was back out on the street feeling free, lightheaded. She started for a restaurant around the corner. Breakfast seemed like such a good idea.

Back in her warm apartment, Sylvia lay on the living room sofa wrapped up in a patchwork comforter, waiting. When Bill found out she wasn't at work, he would call. She tried to imagine his face as Mort told him she had quit. Would he be surprised? Probably. She'd never mentioned quitting to Bill. In the six months she'd been seeing him, she had never opened up to him about anything, least of all something as relatively trivial as her feelings about the company where they both worked. He would call and ask why she had walked out. It would be the first time he would veer off from safe conversation into that which was getting near to dangerous. And it would be the last, too, she thought, smiling. Ha! It's sooo right, sooo right. He could cram the anti-smoking campaign he had been waging for her benefit up his cold ass.

She lit another cigarette as the gray light outside struggled to get into the room. Light, like water, seeking its own level, looked for openings through which to pour, dammed back by heavy linen draperies. Not that it would have flooded with any amount of exhuberance--the rain-washed air wasn't smiling, but was persistent.

She hadn't turned on any lamps. She sat in the darkness waiting for the call, so she could loose yet another constriction on her life. Get rid of him, too--then, and then . . .

He stood across the street from the entrance to the building on Taylor Street waiting, watching the employees trickle out one by one until the trickle stopped. Where was she? Maybe working late? In the three weeks he'd been watching her, she'd never been late coming out the door. Always a first time, he thought. Well, at least it wasn't raining any more, He would wait as long as it took.

She was asleep, dreaming of a brown room scented heavily with cigarette smoke. She sat in a corner coloring flowers, her crayons spread out before her on the floor. Two other people were in the room with her, but they were talking low, a soft rumble across the room, thousands of miles away. For now, the flowers before her were the only things alive. She and the flowers were all that existed. Two red blooms, then a purple, then an orange appeared on the paper, large posies which belonged to no known species.

She was four years old, and the ceiling was so high up the brown walls had to strain to reach it. The cigarette smoke didn't even try; it settled midway in the air, swirling its fingers in a soft soup.

"Sylvia," a familiar, throaty voice called from across the room. "Come here."

She looked up, suddenly forced to admit the rest of the room into being. Auntie Claire sat in a brown, tweedy chair. Its identical twin, placed at an angle next to it to allow for intimate conversation, held a shadowy figure who seemed to be a part of the chair itself. Something was not right. The voices that had been rumbling included Auntie Claire's; the other was a man's, but it had no personality, no character. Just as the hearing had not given any identity to the man's voice, the seeing only divulged a ghostly-brown form that began and ended somewhere on the chair, but she couldn't make out the lines. It was smoke, perhaps, which obliterated his form, or the dimly-lit corner drowned in shadows. Whatever it was, he was indistinct only until Auntie Claire said, "You know who <u>this</u> is, don't you, Sylvia?"

In a sudden flash, Sylvia knew. Still unable to make out his features, still unable to put together a complete face and figure, she knew. But she couldn't speak, couldn't answer Auntie Claire, who smiled in anticipation for what seemed forever, who smiled a curiously horrifying smile as she waited for an answer. Sylvia knew who it was, all right, knew by the look on Claire's face, but she couldn't say the word. It was a word never spoken, a word atrophied at birth. Was it forbidden or sacred? She didn't know, hardly had the equipment yet to make an analysis, but like the ancient Jews, she was dumbstruck at the prospect of naming that which was not, or that which was All.

The smoke thickened around her face She felt nauseous and terribly warm. Her eyes pleaded with Auntie Claire, begged her to free the child from the question. Still, the moment stretched

(continued)

unmercifully. The room spun. Flames licked her neck and earlobes.

I can't say it. I can't. Please don't try to make me. I want to hide. I want my Mommy. Somebody save me. I want my Mommy. I can't say who he is, don't you see, Auntie Claire, I can't say it. He doesn't exist. I know I see him here in the brown shadows, but he isn't real. I cannot speak his name. I can't say it, can't. Hide me, Mommy, hide me from this, his face in the shadows. It hurts. It hurts. Help me, please, oh Mommy hurry, please . . .

She opened her eyes for a second, long enough to see him staring into her face. His eyes were gentle. He had come for her at last. He had saved her from the dream. He, too, was a nameless thing, a forbidden but holy thing enshrouded in black smoke which was already too much a part of her lungs. They embraced each other in the blackened room watching the inferno rise around them.

"Sylvia Green," he whispered.

"Daddy," she mouthed, but no sound came out.

When the blaze died down, only her ashes remained.

****

Judy Belfield

ALLIANCE

He explored crazy
from within and without
to her edges, her fringe,
He discovered crazy
in the strangest places:
at the typewriter
on the phone
in grocery stores--
especially grocery stores
between the kiwifruits
and the avocadoes;
he found her
in the white spaces
of newspapers
and in the glare of lightbulbs.
He made love to crazy
for twenty-five dollars--
it was over
before he knew it;
crazy got off
before he did--
killed his machismo
and his desire.

****

W. A. Kahle

LOVE IS GREEN

He unfolded another dollar--
kissed it before he let it go.
A thousand more coming soon,
to secure the affair intact . . .

She zipped open her purse--
to fondle a crisp twenty.
Viewed him loving his single.
Eyes blazing in absolute passion
a spark bit her fingers.
Those vaulting thoughts remained:
he loves my love--
he dreams my dreams--in green--
to join, we must.

****

Judy Lake

LOVING LIES

Old love letters: lies
wrapped in a delicate, faded, pink
ribbon.
They served their purpose well: I fell
for you
hook, line and bed.
Memories of a past that never was; a
future together
that ceases to exist.
When did "Dearest Darling" die? Wicked
words,
giving birth to: "I'm working late
tonight again."
Lovingly, I place the lying letters
in my suitcase. I'm leaving
The door slams on my memories. B
sometimes I wish you'd lie a in...
sometimes I wish those lies were
true...

****

W. A. Kahle

. . . AT HER APARTMENT

Shadows bounding,
playing along
silky curtains.
Perfume--
fragrant,
prompting luscious
messages.

Music serene,
taunting a haunting
idea
Diamonds brilliant,
radiant beside
tender, sexy ears.

Kisses wet--
seductively formed,
arousing a feeling.
Whispers ticklish,
igniting a blaze
of need.

****

Judy Belfield

BEDEVILED

One evening
drunk on words,
she stumbled into the stranger
who wrapped her up
in a moonblanket
and carried her away.
She surrendered
the soul she couldn't hide
breathed it to the stranger
in a sigh
drawn from her loins.
He, greedy as Mephistopheles,
inhaled deeply,
smiled wickedly,
and vanished.
Years later,
she rests in a velvet cocoon
soullessly purple
and muses
They don't write songs
for me.

****

Judy Belfield

LIME AND MOONLIGHT

Your citrus breath
the sharp scent
softened by sugar;
darkness invaded
cleared away for glow.
We are a green memory
sliding through the pages
of someone else's photo album
and I dream you here
often enough
to still my clamorous mind.
On such excursions
I catch lime sighs
and create bouquets of you
to drink by moonlight.

****

Kim Baxa

ANOTHER SUNSET

Lemon drops of sunshine
quench my thirst
as warm, fingers of air
brush through my hair
a mirage of colors
painted on the sky
While heavens meet the earth
on the horizon
Shadows creep,
reaching into night.

****

Kim Baxa

UNTIL THE END OF NIGHT

Surface dreams disappear,
Solitary thoughts remain
Fantasies will linger on
As pleasure conceals the pain.

Soaring on the breath of night
Illusions penetrate my mind
Barriers break down the bonds
Of messages intertwined.

Drifting high into the clouds
My fantasies take flight
Heading towards eternity
Until the end of night.

****

Kim Baxa

FROM BEGINNING TO END

Sitting on a rainbow
Catching all the clouds
I put them in my pocket
for another day

Standing on a snowflake
Catching up a star
I melt away the snow
into tears

Somewhere on the edge of time
In the middle of a fog
Is the beginning of all
and the end of nothing.

****

Kim Baxa

AN UNTITLED LIFE

Thunder sounds as cold steel
meets warm blood,
seeping from the veins.
An unknown victim

Consciousness escapes with
each drop and
Serenity fills the void
Falling into a deep, bottomless sleep,
as life passes from
one phase to the next.

****

Judy Belfield

REQUIEM FOR A REQUIEM

The melody ends
slides into silence slowly:
its arms thrown up
head swaying
eyes closed
a glimmer of some kind of bliss
and then
a lifeless swoon,
the soft collapse of morning glories.

Without music
words stretch
like the legs of dead rabbits--
I cannot make them warm
cannot coax them to quiver . . .

and somewhere in my soul
the melody ends
today and tomorrow
again and again.

****

Kim Baxa

A MOMENT IN WINTER

The winter sun dazzled
as it reflected off
the clear white snow.
Breath hangs suspended,
a vapor cloud on the wind
a rainbow forms
as the vapor meets
the reaching rays of light.
The only sound is snow
clean white snow.

****

Judy Belfield

DEPARTED

Things stuck in your mind
too far back to think
let alone give words to;
things shapeless as smoke
soundless as death
yet there--
still waters
cutting deeper down
endless depth
til one day
a nerve sings with pain
the sharp blade of memory
inflicting a wordless wound
which opens to the world
wide, infected,
rich with malignant music
no lyrics to fit--
the hand that penned the notes
atrophied from disuse
and now the need
crying out too late
cannot wake the dead.

****

W. A. Kahle

MARCH OBSERVANCE

Sloppy slush--
puddles of worn-out snowflakes,
dead for weeks,
transformations of nature.
Children playing--
in a spectrum of colors,
needing the speed
of a quick, seasonal switch.
March madness--
not winter, not spring,
loaded with anticipation.
Salty corrosion--
on filth-stained highways
aiding the acceleration
of weather-worn cars.
Those gray atmospheres
where the sunlight is blocked,
will part with expedience
in about four weeks.

****

Donna Shibovich

A LOUD HISSING BUZZ

A loud hissing buzz
is that what it was?
The agony I felt
when I entered my program
into your computer.

****

Kim Baxa

AUTUMN COLLAGE

A passionate purple panorama
as red leaves meet blue skies
a painter's pallette,
shades of orange, red and yellow
the stage is set, dancer's ready
orange leaf sifts through the tree,
slowly floating to the ground.
Yellow leaf drops fast and sure
from branch to ground in one swift step
the clouds come together
rains fall down in torrents
trees bow down in homage
leaves join together in a final dance
a swirling, twirling dance of life and change

****

Judy Belfield

GRASSHOPPER

Hours ago
a luxury of opportunity
spread out
like a lord's feast in a mead hall.
I had only to take what I wanted,
reach out and grab.
Instead, I sat back smiling
thinking I had eternity;
I sat back smiling
locked in daydreams.
The moments sheared themselves off
one by one
until now
time is squeezed in a tiny space
my arms are clamped against me
and breathing is difficult.

****

Judy Lake

A LITTLE IMAGINATION

Eddie was a dreamer. His dad said he had imagination-itis, whatever that was. Eddie thought it had something to do with the monsters in his room.

Every night, Eddie's parents tucked him into bed and listened to his prayers. Then they turned out the light. Almost every night, in the darkness, Eddie saw the monsters.

One night, the monsters made Eddie's Incredible Hulk doll wave at him. Another time, the monsters drive his army jeep from his toy-box to the foot of his bed. And once, Eddie even heard the monsters whistling at him through his bedroom window.

So, almost every night, Eddie would jump out of bed and run down the hall to his parents' room. His dad would always turn on the lights and show Eddie there were no monsters. Then Eddie would get back in bed.

"Should I leave the lights on, or are you putting your imagination to sleep?" Eddie's dad would sometimes ask. Eddie was not quite sure what this dad meant. As far as he knew, he thought his imagination must go to sleep when he did.

"Sometimes," Eddie thought, "grown-ups say some pretty weird things."

Once, his mother told him to get his head out of the clouds and come back to earth. Now, Eddie knew for a fact that he was not tall enough to reach the clouds.

"What's that s'posed to mean, Ma?" he asked his mother.

"It means you had better concentrate on the job I gave you to do and stop dreaming. Get back to work, please?"

Eddie was supposed to be sweeping the porch. He had taken the broom and before he knew it, the broom had turned into a bucking bronco. Eddie was riding the wild beast all over the back porch when his mom told him to come back to earth.

Even Eddie's schoolteacher noticed that he liked to daydream. Eddie used to sit in the row of desks right by the window. Once, when Eddie was watching the clouds make pictures, he saw a rhinoceros with two horns. He didn't get in trouble until he started whispering to his friend, Jeffrey, sitting in the next aisle. Eddie wanted Jeff to see the cloud-rhino quick, before the sky changed pictures.

Eddie's teacher moved his desk from the window the very next day. Now, Eddie's little desk was right in front of Mrs. Walker's big desk. Eddie couldn't see out the window anymore. Sometimes, though, he thought the wood grain on Mrs. Walker's desk looked something like a totem pole. One day, Eddie actually counted five different faces posed together in the wood.

Christmas was coming and Eddie's school was planning a special program for all the parents. Eddie's first-grade class was going to perform a play about the birth of Christ. Mrs. Walker chose Eddie to be one of the Wise Men. She hoped the responsibility of learn-

(continued)

ing a few short lines for the play would stop Eddie's daydreaming.

The class practiced every single day for three weeks. Parents made simple costumes and the students painted the cardboard scenery. The whole school was preparing for their performance. Each class was doing something special to add to the program.

Finally, the big day arrived. All the students, teachers, and parents were excited and just a little bit nervous. It was decided that the first-graders' play would be performed last, because of its religious nature.

First, the kindergarten class sang several children's Christmas songs. The second and third grades combined and did a short skit about Santa Claus. The fourth-grade class recited Christmas poetry that they had written themselves. The fifth grade sung religious Christmas songs. The sixth, seventh, and eighth grades were coming from the junior high and were going to be part of the audience. Finally, it was time for the first-grade's play with Eddie as the third Wise Man.

Mrs. Walker was proud as she watched her students perform. So far, everything seemed to be going well. The first Wise Man brought Baby Jesus gold. The second Wise Man gave the Christ-child frankincense. Mrs. Walker held her breath as Eddie's turn came to give Jesus his gift of myrrh.

Eddie was trying hard to concentrate. He was nervous because he could feel all the moms and dads in the audience watching him. Eddie walked up to the manger and knelt down. Suddenly, Eddie forgot what he was supposed to say. He tried and tried but he just couldn't think.

But somehow, it didn't seem to matter. Eddie looked down in the manger and he didn't see Sarah Mitchell's Cabbage Patch doll lying there. Eddie imagined that he saw the real Baby Jesus. He was sure of it! He even forgot about his gift of myrrh that he was supposed to place near the manger. Instead, Eddie reached down in the straw and picked up the baby. Tears were in his eyes as he rocked the baby and crooned, "I love you, Baby Jesus!"

"Oh no, this is not part of the play!" thought Mrs. Walker. But then she noticed some of the parents in the front row were also crying. She walked out on the stage and gave Eddie a big hug. Everyone in the audience stood up and began to clap. All the other children asked Eddie if they could have a turn holding Baby Jesus.

The parents swarmed up to the stage and congratulated Mrs. Walker and all the children on the success of the play.

"Why, the end of this play was so moving!" said one mother to Mrs. Walker. "It seemed so realistic! How did the children learn to show their emotions so well?"

"Sometimes, all it takes is a little imagination," replied Mrs. Walker with a smile.

****

Dawn christman

GUARDIAN ANGEL

I walked into the spotless beige waiting room, stepped up to the desk, and introduced myself to the receptionist behind the counter.

"I'm sorry but there are four people ahead of you. If you'd like to have a seat while you're waiting," she said, half-smiling.

I looked across the half-full room and decided to settle down in a chair facing the window.

"Almost 12:30," I thought. "Wonder how long I'm going to have to wait."

The tennis match on TV held my attention for a while, but the constant coughs and sneezes of the woman two seats away from me discouraged my concentration. I noticed the coughing woman's husband

(continued)

Judy Belfield

A CHAT WITH LEONARDO

I sat with Leonardo
the other day
telling him
about Mona Lisa's smile
and all the talk
it's generated
all these years.
He had no words for me,
only, through his long beard,
a smile--
mysterious, of course.

****

trying to hide behind an old issue of Motherhood Today, embarrassed by his wife's loud bellowings.

"God, I hope I don't have to get a shot. I know I promised myself not to think about it, but I can't help it. I'll just tell the doctor I want a prescription. I'll tell him I don't want a shot because I have to go to work. Oh, but what if I can't go to work? What if he says I have mono, or the Russian flu?" I leaned back and let the fluid run to the end of my nose and down my sinuses. My head ached and my nose throbbed. It felt like someone had taken a big scoop of stiff, cold ice cream and plopped it right down into the middle of my brain. The frozen substance stifled my thoughts and made me sleepy. It seeped into every vein and artery making my limbs sore.

"Mrs. Robbins? Last door on the right, please."

"Why couldn't my name be Robbins?" I thought impatiently.

I glanced out the window and noticed a young girl trying with great difficulty to get herself out of the back seat of a car. She looked worn out--her clothes and hair were mussed and her walk resembled that of a gnarled old lady's. She hobbled past the open door and into a waiting wheelchair. The poor girl looked like she was in a great deal of pain, yet every time the nurse would inquire about her injury the girl would start laughing! To laugh in the midst of pain--especially your own takes either courage or insanity. It wasn't a casual laugh, though, but unrestrained hilarity! Why in God's name, I thought, if she was in so much discomfort--and definitely she was, the hanging skin drooping between her dislocated shoulder and socket made me ache in pseudo pain, not to mention the awkward twisted position of her right leg--why then, why the hell was she laughing?

Before I had a chance to hear the girl's explanation, the nurse wheeled her off to an examining room. Since I would not be allowed to hear the reason for her maniacal laughing, I took it upon myself to investigate the possible reasons for her buggy personality. First, I came to the conclusion that she must have been injured while playing a sport because she had a rather small frame and her dislocated shoulder was attached to a rather muscular-looking arm. I assumed this sport to be baseball because the man helping her out of the car wore a Cubs hat. This theory could only be based on assumption, though, because what if she was in the stands watching a Cubs baseball game and accidently fell off one of the bleachers?

My second conclusion is a bit coarse, but nevertheless, a logical assumption. I proposed to myself that the girl could be a lady of the night. Her appearance emphatically denies this--she is short, natural blond hair, relatively thin, and well-kept. The latter characteristic supports my conclusion in that in this middle-class town the majority of the residents are well-kept decent-looking people. In an urban environment, the ladies of the night are usually dressed gaudily and could be used as representatives for the city dump. Though I have never seen a middle-class prostitute I would suppose that she would keep in accordance with middle-class stereotype and appear relatively well kept. The man with the lop-sided Cubs hat nesting on his head could have been her pander, his hideousness assured me of this.

This last conclusion I arrived at probably concepted in the dusty corners of my sex-starved imagination. The sickness that lingers in me has prohibited the fulfillment of my urges, so my mind has resorted to dwelling on erotic visions to achieve intellectual orgasm. The vision I have of this girl getting injured is rather shocking. I see the girl and her lover (the man in the Cubs hat) entangled on a pool table (Cubs fans usually play pool) in a frenzy of swift stroking, rolling, bouncing motions until in her lustful carelessness, she rolls right over the edge of the table and onto the floor, injuring her collarbone and leg. This could very well explain why the girl could not stop her constant laughing, as well as why she could not explain her predicament to the nurse.

The mystery of the ill-fated girl's name had prompted me to create a name for her, suitable to her character. After two or three minutes of deep thought, I had come to the point of christening. I decided to dub the girl Trixie. The name seems to originate most likely in my second theory proposing that Trixie is a lady of the night for obvious reasons.

My investigation of Trixie's batty chortles ended promptly when the nurse called me up to the desk.

"Please fill out this form and sign on the dotted line," she said.

"What is this for?" I asked suspiciously. I had heard about people who sign medical forms unknowingly giving the doctor permission to do a lobotomy on them.

"We just need some general information about your health since the last time you were in. We also need to know

(continued)

Guardian Angel, continued

the name of your insurance company and who to contact in case of an emergency."

I was really getting fed up with all the red tape.

"All I need is some kind of prescription for my cold. Can't you just ask the doctor to fill out a prescription for me so I can be on my way?" I said, getting short-tempered.

"I'm sorry, but you'll have to see the doctor and let him examine you before he can write a prescription."

I turned around, knowing I was defeated, and made my way back towards my chair. My seat had been taken by a vivacious redhead with short-cropped hair. Her two offspring looked like clones. The little boy had her bright red hair, short and cropped, and looking closely, I noticed he even had red eyelashes. His little sister was even more distinctive in that she had the short, bright red hair along with freckles covering her whole body. She's going to be a likely candidate for the homecoming queen when she grows up, I thought.

I had no choice but to take the seat next to the coughing lady. I slouched down in my chair as she was hacking away. "God," I thought, "she's probably got hepatitis."

No sooner did I finally accept the fact that I would probably catch hepatitis from this hopeless woman when she was called in to see the doctor.

I thanked the glorious deity that I would be spared of any more of her involuntary spasms. But when I saw her predecessor heading toward her abandoned seat I gasped. This lady looked like a resemblance to Chaucer's Lady of Bath. She eased down into the chair, legs spread and feet implanted firmly on the floor. Her green and yellow flowered dressed pulled at her legs revealing her naked limbs covered with stubbled hair. She caught me frowning and smiled.

"I gave up trying to be a lady years ago!" she said proudly. "You can't try to be something you're not!"

I looked at the man who had helped Trixie in and he smiled, assuring me that my assumption that this lady was not playing with a full deck was correct.

I broke the promise I had made to myself and looked at my watch. It said quarter to one. The depressing beige walls told me this was going to be a long day. Looking around the room for the first time, I noticed it was terribly drab. The walls were monotone, except for the seasonal portraits residing on them. A few green plants placed on the brown tile floor and the plastic coffee table. Rumpled magazines laid dormant on a stand.

"It's no wonder everyone in here looks so depressed. This whole room is depressing!" I wondered why the decorator didn't paint the walls a bright cheery color like yellow or gold. Some Rockwell prints would look good on the walls, too.

The nurse was looking my way, and motioned for me to come over to her. I leaped out of my chair and practically dashed over to her side. I was finally going to see the doctor!

"Could you please step on the scale for a minute?"

I positioned myself on the middle of the scale, anxious to see if I had lost any weight. I was always amazed at how the nurse could tip the little weights to find out how much a person weighed. I could never understand how they knew which way to move them.

I waited, dumbfounded by my ignorance, for the nurse to give me the news.

"One-hundred and seventy-eight," she said disapprovingly. "You haven't lost any weight," she said.

"But I haven't gained any," I said hoping to dissuade her harsh disapproval.

"Second door on the right," she pointed toward my examining room. "Please remove all your clothes except for underwear. There's a blanket you can use to cover yourself up on the table."

In my cubicle I followed all her directions and removed everything except my underwear. The thick soft blanket I envisioned turned out to be a thin, papery sheet. I hopped up on the cushion of the metal and readied myself for the doctor. The walls, I noticed, were shrouded with Doctor Shedman's degrees and certificates of awards. The odor of sharp, stenchy antiseptic pierced my nose.

I heard a brief knock at the door, expecting it to be Doctor Shedman. Instead, a blond, Nordic-looking nurse entered. She looked apologetic.

"Doctor Shedman had to leave on an emergency call, so you'll be seeing Doctor Minkin. I'm sure he can give you a prescription for your cold," she added, trying to make me feel better.

"Do you have any idea how long I'll have to wait?"

"Well, the Doctor is tied up right now, it will probably be a couple of minutes," she said.

"Sure," I thought. "He's probably back there eating his lunch."

Just my luck to be stuck with a strange doctor. Minkin. He probably lyoks like his name: short, pudgy little guy with fat, shiny cheeks and

(continued)

ungentle hands.

I leaned back against the cold plaster wall, and let my legs dangle over the table. The illness was making my mind, body weak. My eyes closed and I drifted into a pre-sleep stage--I was relaxed yet aware of everything around me. My mind was struggling with itself to sleep. Every time I would drift off, my conscience would tell me that it's not very proper or respectful to be caught sleeping, especially when you're waiting for an appointment.

Suddenly, my body sat straight up. I heard Trixie's laugh next door.

"Ow, Doctor Sully, that hurts!" she said, emitting a small laugh mixed with maons.

I pressed my head against the wall in hopes of discovering the story of her woeful fate. I couldn't make out what the doctor was saying, it sounded like a pool of mumbles.

Time passed--minutes, maybe a half an hour--and still I sistened to the conversation in the next room. Every few seconds I would hear Trixie giggle, then moan in pain. Why the hell was she laughing if she was in so much pain?

I looked at my watch again--it was one-thirty. I got off the table and poked my head out the door, looking for a nurse. I spotted an orderly in a white coat standing outside Trixie's door.

Do you know if Doctor Minkin is still tied up?" I asked.

"Oh, I'm sorry," he said. "I don't work here. I'm waiting for someone."

"Well, thanks anyway," I said, shutting the door.

I hopped up on my perch and began to ponder what the man said. One nagging question chipped on my block of curiosity.

"If the man doesn't work here, then why is he wearing one of those hospital coats?" I wondered. "The man had to be waiting for Trixie because he was standing outside her door. But why was he wearing a white coat? Was he a friend of the man with the Cubs hat?"

A new nurse walked in with an electronic thermometer and popped it in my mouth. After about two minutes, she gently grabbed hold of it and pulled it from my lips.

"Well, what's the verdict?" I asked.

"Oh, you're a little above normal, but I don't think it's too serious."

"Do you think Doctor Mingking is going to be much longer?"

"Minkin," she said.

"What?"

"His name is Minkin, not Mingking."

I heard Trixie laugh and mumble, "Ow." My curiosity felt like it was stuffed into a toaster with the setting on high. I couldn't figure out how to escape out of the dark, metal ins[illegible]s into the light. Then, the timer w[illegible]t off, and I popped out:

"Do you know why that girl next door--"

"You mean Terry?" she said, cutting me off.

"Oh, is that her name?" I was clos[illegible] anyway.

"She's a bit disturbed. You know what I mean." She said making a crazy face.

"Disturbed?"

"Um-hmm. She lives over at the Guardian Institution in Broadmoor."

"Yes, I know where that is," I said. I was very familiar with the Institute. Everyone was. Childhood horror stories about the crazy people locked up at the Guardian haunted the memories of. perhaps, the majority of children growing up in this town.

"I'll be back to check inyou in a couple of minutes, OK?"

"Great." Looks like I'm going to be here for a while.

I was just beginning to doze off when I heard Trixie's laugh. It didn't bother me now that I knew she was apparently crazy. Then I heard two voices on the opposite side of the room. It was a man and a woman, sounded like they were arguing.

"Well, what do you suggest?" the man said. "Do you think I ought to go out and see my lawyer?"

"I don't know, but you better do something, and quick. You know, if he decides to talk, your career is going to go down the tubes." The woman sounded businesslike.

I was wondering what this m[illegible] did that was so wrong. Obviously it [illegible]s pretty bad if his career was in jeopardy. Then I jumped to an unfounded explanation that must have originated in my paranoid nature. I concluded that this man must be a doctor that has some sor[illegible] or malpractice suits against him. I had to quiet my thoughts as I heard them start to talk again.

"You know," she said, "you could decide right now to make him not talk."

This sent a [illegible]silent shrill throug my heart. Did she mean what I thought she did? That the doctor would make him not talk, as in dead talk?

"I don't know, that sounds risky. I don't want to get involved in anything too deep over my head."

"What have you got to lose?" she

(continued)

asked. "If he talks, you're going to be in very deep over your head."

ing! I couldn't believe what I was hear

God, I just had a morbid thought. What if that was my doctor? Doctor Mingking or whatever his name is? The nurse said he was tied up! She said it would probably be a couple of minutes! This doctor probably did something awful to some poor, helpless soul, and now he was going to kill the person just to save his career! And he's coming in here to examine me! My body started to shake uncontrollably. The immediate prospect of death enshrouded me like a long, hard rainstorm.

"I think if you were smart, you'd do something about it right away. The longer you wait, the harder it will be to clear yourself." The woman had a soft, deep voice that commanded authority. She sounded like a female Orson Welles.

"Look, what do you want me to do? Go out and kill the guy?"

I started to throw on my clothes as fast as my hands would let me, but the nurse interrupted me.

"Are you going somewhere?" she asked.

"uh, um, I just needed to go to the bathroom." I could make a quick escape out the door without anyone noticing.

"It's right across the hall. See? Right there."

She was going to watch me go in and watch me come out. I didn't have a chance. I walked across the hall and into the john. I turned around and started to close the door. The nurse was still watching me with a smile on her face. Poor girl, she probably didn't even know! She was working with a soon-to-be murderer! I waited a cou of minutes and poked my head out the door. The nurse had disappeared. Now was my chance to run. I slid down the hallway like an escaped prisoner, sliding along the walls trying not to be seen. I was getting close to the door and could still hear the couples' voices mumbling malpractice and possible lawsuit. There was no one in sight and I flew through the door and broke into a run down the street. When I was out of danger, I was going to go for a long walk and think about this. A ouple of blocks away, I started to slow down. I got a few disapproving glances from people who were shocked to see me running down the street like a crazy person

I walked for a few hours thinking about the strange events I had encountered at the clinic. All of it still didn't make any sense, but I felt more calm and relaxed now that my life was out of danger. I breathed in the cool damp air and watched children play in the street. The sidewalk was damp, it was beginning to mist, and dusk was arriving I found myself about a block away from my old home, and through the darkness I could barely make out the shape of the buildings. I hadn't visited in a while, and was anxious to see if it looked the same. I finally got past the trees that were hiding the building, and was in full view of my old home. Yep, the Guardian Institution looks just the same, I thought.

****

Mike Troyer

THE BLIND MOTHER-IN-LAW

She enters the room and
dutifully
smiles her award-winning smile
and takes her place
among the guests at this
socially
'in' party, where idle conversation proceeds
with caviar and champagne
graciously
served by helpful, well-paid
maids, who listen to the
soft music, played
softly
by the high-class band which knows
only Bach's and Beethoven's
Largos, Andantes, and Moderatos
(to which the crowd
co-operatively
dances), so that she will be
pleasantly
surprised when the
announcement which pertains so
heavily
to her son is made, and
welcomes the girl into the
family
with open arms and
doubly-
wide smiles.

And while the two dance to Bach and
Beethoven,
she departs into a deepening mist,
retreating
with her
dog.

****

Dan Druszkowski

THE LIGHT

The artist paints a picture
Of a candle burning bright
The long red stem of wax portrays
The vastness of his sight

The artist burns the painting
Never seen by those outside
No one else would appreciate
Its beauty when it dried

The artist has his memory
Of a candle that still shines
It's blanked from minds that do not know
That greatness drew the lines

****

Shelbia Chandler

TONIGHT I SIT HERE LONELY

Tonight I sit here lonely
My mind so full of you
I'm backed into a corner
And I don't know what to do.
You see, I don't want to remember
But still I can't forget
And I find it hard to realize
That my life isn't over yet.
I know that you don't love me
I've known that from the start
But it's impossible to deny
That I've given you my heart.
So you don't have to love me
Just use me til you're done
If you can't give me your heart
Let me be near my sun.

****

Judy Belfield

SOME DAYS, ALONE ACHES

Some days, alone aches
like a faraway echo
I strain to hear halfheartedly--
to understand well is to suffer,
but ignoring forces the sound
to follow me like a stray, silent dog
with huge brown eyes.
Somedays, alone can be cured--
any person's voice
can drown the ache
for a price:
I sacrifice the "I feel bad,"
for "How's it goin' for you?"
Maybe this kills it;
maybe just puts it off,
but some days it works.
And then,
somedays, it doesn't.

****

Judy Belfield

IF I HAD A GRANNY

If I had a Granny
she'd be so fat n soft
I'd get lost in her laps.
She'd sing me songs
like "Bringing in the Sheaves"
while she held me
on a big old rocking chair
with lace doilies on the arms.
She'd tell me stories
over and over
til I knew them by heart.
She'd give me all the cottage cheese
and fruit cocktail I could eat
cause I liked it
and she'd like it when I liked things.
She wouldn't care
if I colored outside the lines;
my pictures would all be beautiful
even if I wanted bunnies to be green.
If I had a Granny
I would love her so much
my hands couldn't hold it all . . .
if I had a Granny.

****

Judy Belfield

MIDDLES

Take something mundane
like the middle of an afternoon--
the exact
middle
and make of it
an excitement, a splash:
It was the middle of an afternoon,
the exact
middle;
She sat drinking coffee
laced with exotic liqueur.
Her nose was alive
with a scent of the islands--
what islands? Who cares?
Parrots screeched in her ears
and her curls went limp--
all that humidity and jungle heat
created in the middle of an afternoon
the exact
middle
of a mundane day
that passed the way
of all simple moments
made splashy with dreams.

****

Darleneann Bull

THE TEAR

A
slowly
falling mist
followed by none.
One small spray
tumbling, following
the twists and
the turns of
J O Y

****

W. A. Kahle

SYMBOLS

Chiseled, blue chips
on a porcelain floor,
remnants of an anger
uncontrolled.
Severed wrists, bleeding
droplets of human life--
standard of hatred turned
inward.

Grating screeches of pain
ceased with a smother of
hugs and kisses--
soothers to the soul,
savers of sanity.
Moans of ecstasy
whispering down hallways
of the home undefiled--
clues of new life approaching.

Laughs echoing
through suburban backyards--
hints of joyful times.
Honest smiles,
furious glares,
pats on backs,
kneeling knees and
folded hands....

Symbols of human versatility.

****

Judy Belfield

ACHING AND WAKING

The ribbon of your perfume
ties a hundred loveletters
in a bluepaper bundle;
I hide them in a bureau drawer
behind scarves and gloves
I never wear.
Somedays, I open the drawer
by mistake
and the ribbon
ties my hair behind my ears;
then, sound shocks the fragrance
and aches in my eyes.
I am reminded again
how dead I've been
all these years.

****

Darleneann Bull

PUNCTUATION POEM

If you put.
punctuation where,
you should:
Everything will
come out right.

Period

Putting commas,
where periods go.
And questioning
a statement?
Makes what you
want to say come
out wrong.

Period

Skipping apostrophes
make he will,
Hell
and we will,
Well.

Period

The correct punctuation
as you can see,
can make any sentence
come out sounding
differently.

Period

So if you use,
Punctuation wrong
or dont use any ever
confusion will be ending
never.

Period

****

Dan Druszkowski

HELD IN CHECK

The king is allied with the dawn
The queen and knight make love til dawn
The bishops know
Their church will grow
The folding kingdom's fate is drawn

The king is looking for his bride
The knight makes haste;don't want to die
The chruch willpay
For pawns to pray
The board will break as all have lied

The king walks in and finds his mate
The queen says, "Dear, how come you're
late?"
The lord's been had
By minds gone mad
The knight thinks highly of his date

****

Dan Druszkowski

BEHIND THE FACE

Hiding all the fears
Through costume and disguise
To linger all these years
And still not realize
Flames are burning cold
Watched by blinded eyes
Days and nights are sold
With undetected lies
Symphonies will end
The candle burns and dies
No dreams or hopes to lend
To a heart that only cries
Fears shall always seek
A home upon the rise
If all shelter weren't so weak
The eyes would realize

****

Mike Troyer

ODE TO AN UNKNOWN POET

These poems that I write, my friend,
Are never printed, never read.
Save for the eyes of my few friends,
These poems will not be seen again.

All the words that I've put here
All the feelings held by me so dear,
Shall remain, deserted, here--
Fading yellow throughout the years.

Of all the poems I've put down,
Not a one's received a crown,
A dollar, or a lira down--
But still my pen goes 'round and round.

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W. A. Kahle

THE PSYCHOTIC

The game that
goes on in my mind,
is cruel, yet
relished.
I loathe to witness
a bird,
or smell
freshly-cut grass.
Seeing visions of
death gives a thrill
unsurpassed by greats
in my area...
Rejection is my friend
who is loyal--
never failing.
Impropriety
turns me on as
artistry dangles along.

...purple and black
are soul
setting my
sexual prowess on
fire--
laugh if you will--
or cry, if that is
your style.
All of this is me,
pouring out in ink
onto a tree.
I never asked to
be born--
I just happened:
so on and on I exist
into days of anonymous
purgatory....

...someday someone will
find out
who I am--
but for now a
secret is a secret....

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Shelbia Chandler

MIND GAMES II

When I left the bank, I was furious. As the glass doors closed behind me, I noticed the bitch behind the counter dialing the phone. She was probably warning Diane that I'd be back. Stomping across the street, I jumped on my bike, and rode off in a cloud of dust.

While I weaved angrily through the California traffic, I pictured Diane's face. She was another bitch. Trying to make a fool out of me, but I'd fix her. I was going back to kick ass. No woman was gonna beat me!

Dodging a truck, I turned into the driveway, kicking up rocks as I rode. I was almost surprised that the cops weren't there before me, ready to make their move once I'd stopped. Anyway, the place was deserted and all I could hear was the ocean. I stormed up the stairs and rang the bell.

At first, I thought she wouldn't answer, but just as I raised my fist to pound on the door, it swung open. My fist dropped to my side and I stared in surprise.

She stood there, saying nothing, but looking disgustingly sexy. The jeans and top she wore accented her figure, still youthful after three children. Her dark hair curled loosely around her face, her lips were wet and kissable, while her eyes belonged in someone's bedroom. Anyone so beautiful couldn't really be such a bitch, I thought, but then she spoke, breaking the spell.

"You may as well come in. I kinda figured you'd show up. You never were one to listen."

I growled as I stalked past her. She calmly led me into a large, ugly room. Pointing to an uncomfortable-looking couch, she told me to have a seat. In the distance, I could hear a child bawling. My hackles began to rise. She excused herself and left the room.

I looked around as I waited. Earlier Diane had shown me into her study. This room had less warmth. It was dominated by the couch and had an unlived-in air.

The child screamed louder and I stiffened. Squalling brats always got on my nerves. Kids were a pain anyway, and Diane was crazy to want them. The kid cried louder still, and my irritation increased. I sighed.

"That's my little sister, Tracey" came a small voice from behind me. "She's always cryin' but this time she got a splinter in her finger. Mama's gettin it out."

My jaw dropped in shock when I turned and found myself staring into two identical faces. The astonishment came from the fact that those faces were smaller versions of my own.

"I'm Kenny," said the taller of the two. "That's Drake, but he don't talk much."

He chattered on happily, but I couldn't answer. My attention was drawn to Drake who glared at me in stony silence. Somehow, it made me uncomfortable. I could feel my skin beginning to crawl and I didn't like that feeling.

Kenny continued. "Mommy said your name is Mr. Turner, and you came from Illinois just to see her. Do you like my mommy a lot?"

Just then, Diane came in. She carried a little girl, who I assumed was Tracey, in her arms. Tracey still sniffled but the crying had just about stopped. She eyed me shyly.

"I see you've met the boys. I hope Kenny hasn't talked your ears off," said Diane giving the boys an affectionate smile.

Before I could reply, she said, "Drake, stop scowling at Mr. Turner. Where are your manners?"

"I don't like Turner," muttered the little boy.

My mouth fell open as he continued, "He's an ugly old man and I hate him."

"Drake!" Diane yelled. "You go to your room and stay there until you can apologize."

I was shocked. Diane sounded angry, but I could see laughter in her eyes.

As the little boy stalked away, Diane turned to Kenny. "You can take your sister into the kitchen and have cookies and milk."

When Kenny and a now smiling Tracey had gone, Diane's laughter burst out.

"I'm sorry, Doug," she gasped between giggles. "That's not like Drake, but it's so funny!"

"What the hell makes it funny?" I asked scowling at her.

She looked at me and laughed harder.

"You been teachin' your kid to insult me, Diane?" I asked, by now totally pissed.

She made an effort to sober up but failed. "It's just that Drake stood there looking so fierce and angry and calling you ugly. He looks like you. They both do. I couldn't help myself.

(continued)

"And that's funny," I said trying for sarcasm, but smiling in spite of myself.

Becoming serious, she sat down in a chair facing the couch.

"Are you ready to talk?"

Forgetting the purpose of my visit, I asked, "Why didn't you tell me, Diane?"

"Tell you what?"

"More about the boys," I answered.

"What the hell did you want me to do? Hit you in the knees with one of them? I gave you your chance."

"But I didn't know. I mean, why didn't you tell me that they looked like me?"

"I didn't think I needed to," she answered. "It shouldn't have made a difference.

"It doesn't seem fair."

"Life isn't fair, Doug," she said darkly.

I looked up in surprise, but she went on.

"Tell me why. Why should it have mattered?"

"Somehow, seeing them, seeing myself in them, makes them more real, more connected."

She stood and walked to the window. "You see, that's where we differ. They've always been real to me. They were real when I told you I was pregnant. They were real when you asked me to murder them . . ."

"Diane," I interrupted, "I said abortion, not murder."

"It's all the same in my book. If I'd aborted them two lives would be lost. I would have had their blood on my hands. I couldn't have lived with that."

I stared at my hands as she returned to her seat.

"I couldn't deny those boys life. I thought there was only one, but I didn't have to see them to make them real."

"Diane, you don't understand. I . . "

"Oh, I understand perfectly well," she interrupted. "It's your damned male ego. You see those boys not as children, your children to be loved, as extensions of yourself."

"Isn't it about the same thing?" I asked.

"No, it's not," she answered. "Your child you love, not just because it's part of you, but just because. He may not have nay of your features, his personality may be completely different from yours, but you love him even so. Do you think I love my boys any less because they don't have my features? Tracey looks like me, but Kenny and Drake are just as important."

I looked up and our eyes met. Hers were bright with unshed tears. I looked away quickly as she went on.

"When I left, I was mad and hurt, but when the twins were born, I wanted so much to share them with you. Mama said I was crazy, but I had to call. Then you said you didn't care and that hurt. Now, you sit there telling me they weren't real. You know, just because you deny something doesn't make it any less real."

"But if you had sent me a picture. I would . . ."

"Dammit, Doug!" she shouted. "I shouldn't have had to. When you turned your back on me the last time, you also turned your back on them. How would you explain that? Five years of neglect, just because you didn't have a picture? Be for real! "

Sucking in my breath, I said, "All right. That's water under the bridge anyway. What about now? Why not start fresh?"

"What the hell do you mean, start fresh?" she sputtered.

I admit when I came in earlier, we were at cross purposes, but I've seen them, Diane. I want to get to know them I don't want to go back to Illinois."

She took a deep breath, and stared at me. Her hands shook slightly as she reached for a cigarette, lit it, and offered me one.

"Oh, I see," she said finally. "What I said this afternoon still stands I don't want my boys influenced by you."

"They're mine too," I injected.

"Biologically, yes, but I don't want you around them. You're a bad influence and I want them to be better than you."

"What the hell is wrong with me?" I shouted as I jumped up clenching and unclenching my fist.

She didn't bat an eyelash. She stood, moved closer to me, and said into my face, "You're an unfeeling bastard. You can't hold down a job, you're hot-tempered, and you'll never amount to nothing."

"Ah, listen to the lady's grammar slip," I taunted, reaching for the sore point I knew was there.

She flinched, but continued. "See what I mean? You only want to hurt people. You don't care about nobody else. All you ever think about is you. When you're an old man, you will still be living for the moment. You don't have what it takes to step out of the gutter and I'm not gonna let you take my children down with you. Why don't

(continued)

you just crawl back into your hole!"

"Diane," I said unsteadily. "You're wrong. I'm going to show you just how wrong. You're gonna eat those words, Lady."

"Hah!" she said as I marched out.

When I hopped on my bike, I was already planning for the future. It was nearly a week later that I remembered that I hadn't mentioned the cancelled check to Diane.

"Oh well," I thought, raising my glass. "Here's to a better life."

****

Judy Belfield

STILL WITH ME

I've moved out
moved away
gained a partner
became a parent myself--
she's still with me:
sit up straight
get your shoes off the couch
your legs look like hamhocks
do a thing right the first time
grow up
stop picking your face
girls with fat thighs look obscene
in shorts
can't you breathe more quiet
your voice carries like a screech in an
echo chamber
no, don't take a job washing dishes--
you're better than that

Now,
I never sit up straight
my shoes are always on the couch
I pick my face constantly . . .
I won't grow up, but
my hamhocks are bigger,
I never believed I was really "better"--
rebellion, I guess
but
nobody ever hears me breathe
I don't wear shorts,
my voice is a near-whisper
I never wash dishes, not even my own,
and
I always do a thing right the first time.

I'm working on the faults
feeling guilty when I fail--
but, look Mommy,
see what I did?
Will you stick this poem
on the refrigerator
next to the drawing of the carrot
that looks like a pumpkin?

****

W. A. Kahle

STAR INGREDIENTS

I view you
in black and white,
a spectacle
from Warner Brothers
latest attraction--
circa 1933.
Sultry blond hair
wisps across
an oldies screen,
tantalizing male minds--
torching jealousy for
home-grown housewives.

A voice you possess
stirs emotions rich--
the hatred
love--
lust--
laughter--
mixed ingeniously
prevails throughout
the touched.

****

Mike Troyer

SONNET #3: FLYING

I feel my draggingspirit flying free
On gossamer wings with finely feathered
tip;
Slowly passing over land and sea
With gentle curves and sweeping, shallow
dips.
I feel my dragging spirit tow'ring high
Above the grieving masses of the Earth
Who softly sing their haunting lullabies
To children, wanting death to give them
berth.
I feel my ragged spirit winging on,
Higher yet toward the shining sky--
And long before I get there, I'm beyond
The point that I could never say good-bye

But should this heartless spirit ne'er
take air,
This lonely, ravaged heart will die,
ensnared.

****

Judy Belfield

PASSIN TIME

Skinny old man eatin pancakes
brown-trousered, brown-sweatered
holds his fork hand-over
instead of under
while his watch slips around
on his skinny wrist.
His gray hair parted on the left side
combed over
before some careful mirror.
He stops spearin
props up his elbows
folds his hands over each other
like "here is the church,
here is the steeple,"
and his watch slips down his arm
while he chews
pancakes with syrup
and luscious yellow butter
disappearin inside of
his skinny old body
He sees me lookin
and nods--
he'd tip his hat, sure as hell
if he had one on.
He's finished now
the plate so clean
his mother would smile
if she was watchin
knowing them babies in China
would still be starvin
but her son don't waste no food.
He lights up a cigarette
and another old man says,
"You still smokin, Jim?"
He lets the smoke curl
through his nostrils
out into the air
and pushes his plate
across the linoleum-covered counter,
pulls his coffee close
takes a sip
his watch goin crazy
up and down his skinny wrist.
He talks to the other man.
I can't hear any of it--
a low rumble of male voice
making noise with smoke . . .
I keep watchin
that watch
slide up,
then down.

****

Valerie Radcliff

UNKNOWN ENEMY

Red, sparkling pools of pleasure
Bubbling in a sea of
Who made thee thus?
From whence did thy frame embark?

Thousands have perished
Under your mesmeric hold
While doubting the power
Of your inherent corruption.

You bring them misery and woe
Yet they return
To taste once more
Of your metriciously good tang.

Your existence is deemed necessary
By those who are caught
In your vicelike grasp.

They created you
For their own titillation
Yet you use them
Like a marionette

Beseech your creator
To bring your demise

For your creator ignores
Your perspicuity
And rashly consumes
The assemblage of your corpse.

****

Mario Garza

CHRISTMAS CALAMITY

I remember on one fine Christmas Eve,
We all saw a sight that we wouldn't believe,
My sister and I stood up all night hiding
Patiently waiting for a Santa Claus sighting,
and then in the distance we heard a faint jingling
We smiled with glee as our senses were tingling,
as he came closer the sound starting growing
we heard a loud thump and a loud "Ho-ho-hoing,"
we looked at the chimney with anxiety churning
and then I remembered the fire was still burning
A round, plump, red figure rolled out of the fire
He screamed, then lay still, his life had expired.
"Oh no, we killed Santa!" I screamed in distress.
My sister said calmly, "Let's clean up this mess."
We dragged the round figure down by the stair
And laid him all flat with tender and care
My sister gave him a boot right in the rump
He fell down the steps with a thumpty-thump-thump.
Down through the basement and into the sewer
His body now rested with soot and manure.

****

Shelbia Chandler

A SUICIDE NOTE TO THE PRESIDENT

A suicide note to the president
Is the best that I can do
To let him share in all the grief
And pain that I've been through
So Dear Mr. President,
This is hello and goodbye
Because soon I'm going to die.
I'm 3½ months pregnant
My man just split
I can't feed my children
So I have to quit.
The Welfare people say
I don't qualify
And I've wracked my brain
To figure out why.
I've had so little schooling
I can't get anymore
You see, education isn't easy
To come by, when you're poor.
We have no home
I'm living on the street
Last week I went to jail
Because I stole a little meat.
I really love my children,
But we can't go on this way
So I'm giving up my dreams
And there's little left to say.
Except about my children
Whose lives I hope get better
And that brings us down
To the point of this letter.
Mr. President, be understanding
When you're dealing with the poor
I'm just one tiny voice
But I number with many more.

****

Judy Belfield

CHEERS!

All right,
let's get happy;
tear out that melancholy
and paste on a smile--
who cares if it isn't real;
it's what shows that counts.
Sweep that depression
under the rug
and make sure it ain't lumpy;
what we want here
is cheerfulness
and laughing.
Let's hear some happy talk--
up-tempo, optimistic;
never mind the blues.
Positive thinking
leads to the genuine article,
and you know
it takes more muscles to frown
than it does to look pleasant.
Rah, rah, blah, blah . . .

The drill sergeant
in the psycho ward
barked on and on.

****

Judy Belfield

A RIGHT TO LIFE

I am a cancer breeding wild,
an uncontrolled parasite
consuming its host.
Would you have me cut out?
A living organism
with a singular identity?
I have a name,
though it's only spoken in whispers;
I have being
at the expense of another--
still I exist,
and I am fruitful.
I will be a burden to this host
all my life--
she will worry every day about me;
her fears, one after another,
I will confirm,
yet she will feed me
and I will devour her.
I will not stop
until she dies,
and I, alas, with her.

****

Judy Belfield

A FINE TIME

When it gets so complicated
that every turn
bumps into another implication
it's time to pull out
return to simplicity.
Emptiness would be
the ultimate relief
but vacuum exists
only outside life
and I don't know if I'm ready yet.
Some days, the lure of end
is overwhelming
not because I've given up
or feel depressed
but because I've thought too much
and it's a fine time to stop
before the thinking becomes perverted
before--and I feel it more and more--
I become too jaded to laugh.
Maybe it's too late
and I'm already dead
but too much of a coward
to lie down and rot.

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Judy Belfield

EPILOGUE

A dark, cool blue
crunchy as lettuce;
I remember a question
in your eyes
afraid to be said--
an arm's length apart,
I answered with a kiss
we only imagined.
January sang chill
in our ears--
Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers,
you and I
dancing in the dark
across a large tiled floor.
It was all black and white,
yes and no, earth and snow,
nothing between
but fields of bells
chiming like flowers in a breeze
yesterday
when we were older than we knew.

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WORDEATER 51